

IN MEMORIAM



Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. 1932 - 1983

A POETIC TRIBUTE BY FIVE FILIPINO POETS:

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FOREWORD

These poems were occasioned by the death of Benigno S. Aquino, Jr., last August 21, 1983. The authors claim no affinity with him, either by politics or by blood. He was simply a presence in our lives, touching us once in a while through his work as a member of the defunct Congress. He was part of our mental landscape, at times even a vexing question about whom we were variably skeptical and biased, given this tendency not to take anything or anyone at face value. We cannot recall having met him. Some paths never cross. However, his sudden death by assassination effected in us certain responses on the intellectual and poetic levels, resulting in these poems.

The poetic genius is a strange entity; so is the mechanism of human events. The energies of the former may be accidentally released by the latter, creating an unplanned explosion. These poems, then, are the explosion of the authors' poetic genius as it was mysteriously affronted, challenged, and seduced by Aquino's death. We tried to grasp at some meaning in the language of heart and tongue, and wrote not as partisans in a partisan game but as witnesses to a universal drama.

These poems are our humble memorial to that death and, at the same time and more importantly, our celebration of the mind and spirit of the man who has changed the course of the nation's vision.

— G.H.A., C.F.B., A.N.S., R. de U., A.A.Y.

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥ ΑΙΩΝ

How To Get It Straight

1.

How to get it straight
If a savaged conscience speak
Through our words' unruly rift,
And so draw the blood
Of that we do not know
Nor feel as our gap,
And spill it there
In the void of words, hot
As original blood,
Unflickering, geyser-strait,
Out of time's mud —
If that be
Our point of sores,
We must needs filch light
From stranded gore,
To see with compound eye
And not jump to speech
Like a fly that feels its death,
And only see,
Like a sleepwalker by day
Dirigible by his dream,
Whose blood congeals, whose
Curse his writ anneals?
—Athwart the grammar of politics,
Outside the pale of texts.

2.

Mark the spot well
Where this man fell
Here
His abstract country
Tarmac without text,
Or here perhaps
As whose blood tells
Or there as just as well —
The very spot
To validate his spill
Where words grope still
Here
There
And nowhere he who fell
So near speech,
So far.
And now, what State
Or statement still,
As clear, as fell,
Than gunman's first report
That tore our media's tongue?
There his victim lies:
Of his time's possible Eden,
What word infallible?
Or does exile in the end
Make one's ground invisible?

3.

He had a message up his sleeve,
Or reason's reasoned script
Or loose leaf of his dream
Without our words' tinsel.
Read it well,
Without gloss but as blood tells
To fire its fatal fuses
Without silt of other speeches.
For it no longer helps to cry,
Tell it straight,
Resound the ravaged voice
Through our weir of words —
That deadly bar to cross
From textile to text —
And so touch
The bleeding spot of need
Ladies and gentlemen
Where he fell
So near speech,

So far.

4.

And meanwhile,
His autopsy plays Teiresias
At death's meridian,
Deciphers the script of his wound
And takes fickle measure of
His assassin's massacred corpse.
Read, hypocrite,
The technical havoc writ
Bold upon their flesh.
Is it meaninglessness
Drives through our grave
Our lonely rhetoric?
To read aright,
Stay awhile the old ethic
But hold to power austere,
Its trajectory without writ.
This, though lashed
To truth, exceeds every fire,
Then leave no ash.
This forgives no one's script
And makes justice strange;
It casts out rebel texts
To exorcise the nervous State.

5.

So the inquest snails along
And scandal grows as entrails
Sing their hero's geste.
A corpse, alleged as gunman,
Ransacked and left to rot,
Flaunts his embroidered brief,
His index ring, his last sun's
Telltale froth,

And still his name
Eludes the official text
Despite the factory of truth
By glaring facts unvexed.

Here then
The hanging stitches of our peace,
The magic inches of our deceased;
Here the stumbling block,
Our hymns and omens cracked,

As, to our body politic,
The law's due process excretes
A dead man's links —
His hoard of notoriety.

Unriddle this sphinx,
Its graveward stare —
How, after death, strange words
Excavate our lair
And forge our identity.

6.

What if the investigator's
Sly report cannot rule
Those questions that leap
Out of script?

— Why, his chief
Must use a Delphic staff
To prop his airy gunman's
Tottering tryst, sir.

Or if the law's umbrella
Cannot shield the horny heel
From prophetic vocabula,

— Why,
Another bar must serve as well
Oedipus' stink to unravel, sir.

And so our days unscroll,
And still more lies!
If the dead anonymous text
Fathers auguries of his guilt,

Why, still
In Oedipus we trust, sir,
Who, sick at heart, secretes
His covenant's soldiery and writ.

Yet beware, autocrat,
Of time's ambush, your moldy
Dusk, the living dead —

And most Teiresias,
Groping through the anguished mob,
Whose walking stick directs
His furies, sir,
To your internal rust.

7.

And in the mean spell,
Rallies and rabble rain
Their prayer power down,
And priest and whore
Strew black confetti and yellow
At every door —

But at night,
Each one to his cell,
The outcry clots and jells
Like torn eyes on the floor!

How shall we ride
Time's old beast down,
Or hold in leash one man's rule?

Where dreams
Their furies loose —
The sandman, the hanging cross,
The throttled goose —
Unscript your daily text.

What price truth, Oedipus,
With devaluation of its word?
Let its factory a strike declare,
And bargaining forbid,
All the king's men unswear
Their fealty to super Rex,
His writ upon the wailing wall;
And collect the bloodied pieces
Of his victim's wreck,
To make our image whole
As Thebes before the Sphinx.

8.

Through what crucible
Will words to speak be purged,
And speech be possible?

What anger heaves
As heart's stone —
How should it be hewn
To shape a lady's diamond?
Or what demon of subversion
Is yet seraph to Thebes?

Sharp as the truth
Crypts a dead man's speech
Are the madman's laws
Who thunders his letters down
To buttress his writ's estate.

What nightmares more
Before the word can denote
Its figure?

What rope, what rubric
Of reconciling, beyond hysteric
And reviling?

Reconciliation is last,
Without words yet, without lust,
But a visceral, underground process
Must drag out not only corpses.

9.

Our facts still lie,
We must shift and interpret;
Our views do not hold,
We must manipulate.

And three months after,
What point without sores?
Is there a meaning fixed?
For every truth we achieve,
Or only process
That we weave and unweave
Where our words dance
Or are estranged?

Is history the variant
Fiction our feats secrete?
These be the words yet
That govern us more than men —
Murder, assassination, homicide,
The close relatives of blood
Not offered for drink.

Why fix differences
Oblivious of their stink —
Manslaughter, liquidation, suicide,
Their painted faces, their bitter
Lees —

Is there life more
Beyond our words' door?

Pray, brother,
Now and at the hour,
So, if the future jump
A dead man's deadly script,
We may be gently damned,

Nor yet plead alone
We're nothing but our words,
Our feats their murky texts.

**Concerning The Death, By Assassination,
Of Benigno Aquino, Jr., August 21, 1983**

Words are Flesh.
— Buddhist teaching

The word was dead before it was uttered.
Under the noon heat, having flown a sky
of short fear and long desire, six syllables
twitched, bloodied, cut down by a secret spy.
What message did they whisper to the earth
when silenced shocked the bullet in the brain —
the end of empires? the text for violence?
concord and clemency blooming in pain?

For one word, the ritual rose to heights —
fever at first, then death disguised in blue,
till the word fell down, unspoken, unheard,
misunderstood, misjudged, declared untrue,
rushed to the grave without knowing why, while
a nation mourned and wept because it knew.

Some Basic Principles of Statecraft

If gardens say the things they must
and flowerflags unfurl their tongue
how close to evening will seem the past
and wrongdoers will weep their wrong

Kings and gardens have language
that sways mightier than scepter
You cannot pin it down to a page
because it has no written letter

It cools the stone that carries the wind
through treachery of ice and fire
It is money to a tyrant's mind
The gardener tones it with the mire

It fruits with curse and guillotine
Declares a city valid for rape
whose citizens watch through bloody wine
their future blown up like a safe

It cultivates the soul of wisdom
but plants rocks where they cannot grow
to support the imagined kingdom
to know the things they do not know

If kings and gardens ruled the world
and made Fear lord of the treasury
then banktellers and bankdrafts would
achieve perfection in some degree

But kings are jesters and gardens stones
who shut out language from their throne
tie it to the stake with royal pomps
and killing it perish with its bone

BAUTISTA

Parable of the Gardener

The keeper of minerals and flowers
is dead. Amongst pines and soil, dead.
Plucked from the roots, milled in the wind,
blown round and round in what words said.

Words said: "He clings to vegetables
whose beginning is rock, not a table
beside the sea nor eagles bumping
against tin roofs, whose teeth of sable

glimmer in the sun and smoke; he flips and
flaps in the silence of memory, down
the rude gorges of bees, flung against sand
which metaphors betray." Yet language

lacks the mind to know the miracle
he wrought on evenings and stars —
song in darkness when darkness could not tell
the equinox, dew in the fern, milk

in the cow, money in lichen — yet
words are dumb to know how in his finger
reared the head of greenness, rich and singing
the anthem of birth; yet love is longer

than words it cannot say. It cannot say
for one, that seasons now will fail, now
that the space he leaves demands a greater
finger to fill, to repeat the vow

infallible in the woods. Nor trees could.
He lies red and still, the sky in his eyes
while birds and petals cackle in the air,
pursuing their selfish ordinary ways.

Thoughts On An Assassination, Ten Years Hence; Or, A Country Full Of Magicians

"Illustrate the sound through the silence of sound
such that the syntax of nothing become speech" —
that was writ ten years ago in a bamboo
house near the sea. "Love, though simple, will not shine.
It is not rock nor moves with the rock, nor born

for trains whose mileage prophesy distant wars
with clothes of peacocks. It does not carve the horn
announcing rain or fire. Yes, its fingers die.
It is alphabetic, or else it is mute.
It croons the anthem from which nets are made" —

was it ten years ago, by the sea? And was
there a woman to whom these words were addressed?
The mind is dark that would confront the sea, or
the memory of the sea, though the skull fills
with sound. But what was there to say, even then?

What is there to say, even now? Manila
sleeps in the memory of its ruins, dreams
in the night politic. Was it worth the blood,
the anguish, and the gold, this antique grandeur
that reclines in the dust? This living city

of the dead dares the living to die, to hold
what cannot be owned, and renouncing all, cling
only to the beauty before the fall, sounds
of navies cluttering the waves, spices, slaves,
dancing women who would trick the court, letters

for gods and devils, cannonballs. Standing where
blood flooded the Pasig shore, my heart aches with
sorrow, I cannot speak, my bones break over
broken statues and fountains, houses aging
row on row. I have a taste for death, true, what

vultures take, for the volumes that call the skull,
tons and tons of them rotting in the graveyard,
but who would carve me in the card or portray
my look? Is not dying also only an
art that melts with garlic on the skin? Yes, it

was worth it, Manila that strangles the mind,
but only for the mind then, when anything
could begin, and only for the heart then that
could find the best tongue among the worst, the strong
among the blind. But we who tread upon its

ashes recoil from thoughts of men who brought
it down, the clashes that killed it, the airplanes
which dug its grave. We died. What is there to save?
This has not been writ, though I walk the same shore,
listen to the same sea. The poem wriggles

in my head like a fish in a bowl, its words
climbing up the rim to meet the light. Can this
be writ? Or is the mind a pyre pit? Somewhere
in the stacks of bony alphabet drying
in the sun is a rhyme for this destruction

And a meter to mark a tyrant's abuse ...
In the act of making the poem, the blood
of a thousand peasants glimmers like a flag,
and carcasses of heroes thicken with flies.
The poem must be writ in pain, then, in flesh

full of pain, with letters a tyrant cannot
abuse. Climate, terrain, tools, money in banks,
passports — the mercenaries must be covered
by, moving from age to age, fixing time bombs
to our rage — the poem must say that. Also

this — the enemy wears jungle boots backwards
so that, like Janus, he can grab the Present
and the Future at the same time, or confined
to quarters if captured, he can bargain with
oracles for his head. It cannot be said

that he will not stop the growth of the poem
In a country full of magicians, even
God may disappear, flicked into Oblivion
by sleight-of-hand, and rhymes lose their wings to doves.
It survives by magic, in fact — its programs

political or economic, social
or historic, contract and expand upon
the utterance of the secret word. Masters
they are of this art who control the money
vault, who, by a change of tongues, can make sugar

and cooking oil vanish from the markets, and
anybody's husband also if he waves
the wrong placards. They have guns that kill and then
disappear, leaving no trace of powder on
the fingers nor smell of fresh wound in the air —

and the victims himself, with his head blown off,
becomes a mere image outlined in chalk on
the street! What pure art! What neat conjuration!
Hands quicker than eyes, and words quicker than hands,
they juggle these islands like balls, all seven

thousand of them, with the peasants, laborers,
and clerks clinging to their edges like frightened
flies, up and down, round and round, not one being
dropped, while the world looks on and a war rages
in Iran and Lebanon, and ten thousand

Chinese perish in dungeons in the name of
culture, up and down, not one island being
dropped, the quickness and the rhythm of it, oh
the beauty, there on stage! How can the poem
surpass this magic to scrape out the trance from

the eyes? I sit on the same shore, by the same
sea, yet words still hide under the sand and sounds
echo only in my mind The poem of
the mind of the people and the poem of
the mind of the tyrant are one in dark times....

Papergame: A Probable Letter To A Third World Emperor

The sex of sex! The devil in the loins! Tombs
and worms and dancing to decay! Bamboozle
gravestone to alter time! Become the brainstorm
that breaks covenants with cowards! Yet I will
only say that you, Sir, are as much at fault

as the demagogues that litter you City
with paper torn from telephone books. That your
City is buried in garbage is the risk
of your rule, that bankers run away with our
money is the child of your neglect. Expect

blood to clean the streets like a rainfall, they will —
teardrops will not suffice any more, nor winds
from western land. The assassin with bullet
mind works in your brain only, kills in your brain
only, plots your schemes only. Oh, if only

we could share your imagination! We too
would see through the fog of ignorance and use
the resource of your wisdom, all its primal
principles, the images with which it forms
your policies. But you assign your police

to disturb even our dreams, we have nowhere
to hide. We cannot create pride to forget
our pain when again and again you erase
the face of justice from our book and tell us,
"Look! She is there, are you blind?" The streets are lined

with corpses without names, and she is not blind;
we sing with steel pins in our throat to people
who will not give us bread, and she is not blind;
our sadness lengthens like the Wall of China,
fashioning the rope we would swing by, and she

is not blind. Because we are blind, we convey
our protest through paper — cut paper yellow
and white, swirling and twirling mutely in air,
words ripped apart, thrown out, bumping and jostling
each other in the wind, looking sadly at

each other as they fall to the ground. Do not
be alarmed, Sir; this is just a papergame
we invented to support your pronouncement
that the people are free. Like alphabet soup,
which we eat in silence, this papergame is

non-violent and develops our fingers
in the absence of pianos. Who knows what
seedling may spring from the earth when this paper
takes roots and matures? Then, all over the land,
yellow and white trees would push the sky, their leaves

scattering the smell of joy. In the meantime
we shake our fingers of paper from windows
and balconies to feel each other's sadness.
There are million fingers hungry to be touched,
to touch, to know for once that your policies

cannot stop their touching, Sir, nor their falling
to the ground. You may wipe out their sex, or tax
their sweat, but you cannot play this game, Sir, with
all due respect, because you will not accept
the rules. This is the politics of fingers

performed in the wind, winding paper without
parliament or royal guards, which whispers, Oh,
countless complaints against your men. Can you hear
the sound falling sharply like knives? Consider
now the point it makes in the State's memory;

can you hear the sound shivering as it falls?
Consider that as the flight of sanity
that your chroniclers will not record nor your
minstrels rhapsodize. Finger politics flings
in air images sliced from human sorrow,

weaving them complete in your mind only, if
your mind does not move. Everything imagined
is history, that is, embossed in the blood,
and all your office bric-a-brac, your kalends
of flesh, your hoarded power, cannot alter

its meaning. This papergame, for instance, will
occur in your dreams. Fingers of paper with
pointed nails will scrape the corners of your skull
for the virtues by which you rule. Be a bomb,
a dolmen, or a boor — they will force your fear

to bleed. Will you try to read between the words
 what the fingers want to say? Will you confirm
 the verity of the external world which
 the fingers lament? The dragomen you sent
 to steal what we know left us only our names,

and these we wrote on the fingers shaking now
 in your skull. Watch our names as they twinkle in
 your dreams: Cirilo, Benigno, Arturo;
 Rolando, Fernando, Prospero; flagmen,
 bulletmen, lawmen; assassins without guns;

terrorists terrorized; secret agents who
 would not keep their secrets. Let these names color
 your sleep, Sir, they will do you no harm. But in
 the nakedness of day, when in your palace
 you sign decrees that strangle our soul, they will

fly at you like poisoned butterflies, flitting
 and flipping their syllables at you body.
 How can you contain the accountancy of
 this event? What prayer can transform morals
 into calculus? Since betrayals begin

just under the skin, lock your Cabinet and
 listen to these names, these papermates, shaping
 the first bones of speech for a mute assembly:
 Cirilo, Benigno, Arturo; listen —
 Rolando, Fernando, Prospero. Listen.

Death Like Stone

The news
 buries us.

It comes
 with
 the frank immediacy
 of
 stone.

What
 affection
 we have left
 turns
 to
 lead:

Can we still
 call you
 by
 a nickname?

(Tragedy also buries
 diminutives.)

We know
 something
 has
 been
 shed

Pried off
 like
 loose stone
 from
 loose earth

and yet
 we walk
 no lighter
 than
 before.

Who knows
 what
 stone
 is
 really?

We only feel
 this
 weight.

A Way Of Coming Home

I think the end came
with his one foot
raised in air — poised
— like an inverted
benediction

He was stepping down — isn't that how one goes into a country from the air?

Hawks and eagles, they too,
land on their feet. But nothing,
nothing was to come out of this.
Neither blessing nor returning.

As the sun touched his crown
it knew. Another door had
opened
to welcome him neither

As priest
nor as bird

A Philippine History Lesson

It's a history that
moves us away
from what we are

We call it names
assign it origins
and blame the might

That made Spain right
and America — bite.

This is what it amounts to:
we've been bitten off, excised
from the rind of things

What once gave us pulp
has been chewed off
and pitted — dry.

Dead Heroes Like Naked Mountains

A silly person once said that only silly persons have heroes. But only exceptionally small people will not acknowledge the exceptionally large persons among us.

— George F. Will

They are as naked mountains,
angered for having been shorn
of trees, shrubbery, grass, nests,
snakes and birds: all manner
of growth upon their crowns,
their shoulders, their knees.

They tower and seethe
and are unable to move,
and their anger seeps in
through our eyes, our noses
and our ears: we see, we smell
we hear what they have lost.

Our senses pain us because
we feel it deeper than skin,
deeper than tissue, deeper
than bone, deeper even
than marrow or blood that clots
in brain and knuckled fist

Being small we are incapable
of thunder: what storms we have
go no further than the bridges
of our noses. We are small,
we can cast no lightning
beyond the tips of our toes.

We are fated, it seems,
to live in shadows. Our hands
are ignorant: they know not
how to build mountains.
They are good only for cupping
mouths that scream.

The small screams
that die as small echoes.

We are small, small
and our angers are small.

Seven Ways To Read An Elegy

I

O his hammer has lost its head
all else lies shattered in its stead

What wood there was for building
has gone the way of mourning

The carpenter no longer sings

II

O his hammer
has lost its head
all else lies
shattered in its stead

What wood there was
for building
Has gone the way
of mourning

The carpenter
no longer sings

III

O
his
hammer
has lost its head

all
else
lies
shattered in its stead

What
wood
there was
for building

has
gone
the
way
of mourning

The
carpenter
no
longer
sings

IV

SALANGA

O his HAMMER has lost its head
all else lies SHATTERED in its stead

What WOOD there was for building
has gone the way of MOURNING

The CARPENTER no longer sings

V

O his HAMMER has lost its HEAD
All else lies SHATTERED in its STEAD

What WOOD there was for BUILDING
has GONE the way of MOURNING

The CARPENTER no longer SINGS

VI

O his hammer has lost its head
The carpenter no longer sings

all else lies shattered in its stead
The carpenter no longer sings

What wood there was for building
has gone the way of mourning

VII

The carpenter no longer sings

THE carpenter no longer sings
The CARPENTER no longer sings
The carpenter NO longer sings
The carpenter no LONGER sings
The carpenter no longer SINGS

SIC/SEC.

these days they fall
fall sheer, astonished steel of spheres
shot with forms of dust and water:

the rains the late
rains of drilled spectral summer
that widowed the grains inside and out
storming without vanes for hinges

the arcs of waves hugely from seas torn
and the woods of houses in ten
villages furrowed on the fatal coasts
piles of the dead the halves of stones

the air up north gaping
in a pale shiver of earth pitched
peeled of church spires and masonry
altars ceilings limbless
icons of angels and saints muffled
the floors choked with rubble

the figure on the airport tarmac
at the beak of a Sunday noon
that will not except
clad in sheer white
(as a flag or a shroud or soon
a bloodstained cerement) unblown
flown in a step ago to an urgent land
his shape marked off
with a skein of chalk
where he fell on the tarmac

— all all pulled down
the shrivelled air unshriven

all pulled down
in newspaper black-and-white
askew under the door of days
from four corners
intimate with image and might

further they break the broken thresholds
we know these imponderable strangers
but not with impunity now
in their prescience of quarried rosaries
they turn the faces of fires ancestral

they pin us down
in the act
of sealing with words
the hurt of the land the mouths
of those dying in the bones of the dead
unburied in the mind, bereft

they pin us
this convulsive chain of brazen eves
like a line drawn
impaling to a cross
at the bottom of stairs worn
from the going down

down their separate shadows
we twist the knot of zeros
into a wick like the peasant's
thick as the moon in its fulness
tomorrow against all bullets
all droughts in the soul and dirges
lit, clenched in the feast of suspicions

soon, fangs of the sun's shadow
will sink sheer
beside windows of our wounds

this circle of days falling
zero on zero riddled, riddling
steely semaphores of implicating streets

o there are holes in the heart
sheer with fallen light
there are holes in the head
we do not know do not touch
or else they bleed
they bleed outright

Still Life

A day that will not end
— one thing after
another
though our words
make us say
the same thing over
and over.

Perhaps it is near
the end of the year
or the sense of an ending:
mothers carrying a basket
of wounds; reruns of re-
enactments; a face puffing
like neon.

Perhaps the debris
or the din or the blood
over so soon
and yet at hand
the air strewn
here now there
slung back and forth
and back again.

A night that will not end
— one curse after
another
though the difficulties
increase
we salute them over
and over.

Hot Peppers

if you shoot me today
tell me tomorrow
if you remember
nothing
nothing left you
there was nothing
in your hand too
or in your head
your head is clear
your blood is clean
if you remember
and everything at once grew
separate from you
everyone drew the line
the air the streets
full of feet and cries
full of heart
so naked you cannot breathe

away from the raw wind
and the shadows of lampposts
you knead a hood
to repeat your meaningless face
they are lying in the air
on top of your table
the words the signs
of letting go
you pluck out your eyes
there is no more weeping
without eyes
you cut off your hands
there is no more weight
without hands
now you are uniform
a buttonless trunk of shadows
dreams hide their faces from you
even dreams know
they can tell I am telling you

Hard Blues

He woke me up while going down
or taking on level ground a few steps
merely — the barely arrived and gone again.
He gave out his watch as he flew in
and kept before him a blank page open —
he wanted some things put down, if only. . .
Or at least it sounded
like gunshot and he fell forward
his arms pointing at opposite directions.
It woke me up. And the voices at daylight
and at night wrung to keep the blood from drying.
And the city as though by clarity pierced
broke itself in halves uneven.
There will be puns and prayers, riddles and psalms,
but already the candles are layering the dark.
It was a rouse of time you can feel so deep and far.

That day I stared at the face behind the glass
where the final bruises of sleep deepened
in him who brought the nearness to my feet.
He was to be the recent passage, like now
he will look the same
on the cover of next week's magazine,
and in the willingness to repeat a name,
or take place, to allow a structure of passion
to move up, be life
from all sides filled in,
or to sunder even without skill
for the time being.

Now I stand here with everyone else
 and elsewhere too everyday a vigil,
 there are no more chairs.
 There is the heading for the streets,
 or the taking to. Fecundities of yellow
 or the fingered initial blinked in the air.
 And the blue paste of whispers: the smallest
 things changing inside, word for word, below
 an arc of ears or a fold of xeroxed papers.
 There is a surface to all these.
 Obliquities or outline
 the arrival, like each day so far away now,
 remains the grain, the looming feature and sign
 of seeing through and setting out.

These are days unannounced
 whose light and shape are secret maps.
 Everything is moving little by little at last
 in the open, almost like first words revived
 or tremulous steps tempted
 in the heart's slow spaces.

**Tonio Bo Ninoy, A Kapkan Elegy
 In The Manner Of Don't Tell Him**

You can't go home. You can't go home.
 You came home again. You came home.
 Being seed of memory, the moment's welcome
 was of high velocity. Did you in. Somebody,
 somebody was done for. What for? What for?
 For martyr root somebody was done for.
 Heat of tarmac left in speed unfelt.
 Pool of blood became two and away.
 You can't go home again. You can't.
 You came to very home. The sense of timing
 was patriot-perfect, the tense correct
 for high drama. Shared with him you did
 who stands in Luneta — the kiss of thought
 that death can dance foreseen as grace of moment,
 that falling as man of mandate meant
 sucking the void of racial song. The shots
 would explode. So would image as hero,
 as bloated as becomes airy history
 in its benign passage. The assassin lives on
 as parallel idea, as underscoring. While under
 the tables the deals go on, the deaths increase
 in number and kind, the years of aggravation
 erupt in silence like scars — those corner-
 cutting cicatrices, those marks by which
 we become Pinoy. Ninoy, Ninoy, I cannot
 mourn you, yet I thank you — for the vision
 of marches under the sun, for a common flow
 of lips bruised from much biting of self,
 for showing in ritual review how it is
 to come home when you can't come home. Again
 the elves of earth revolt. They make things
 happen, somebody to be done for, somebody
 to soar romancing the very wound of home.

Thirteen Ways Of Looking At An Assassin
(After Wallace Stevens, after August 1983)

I

Among seven thousand islands
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the assassin.

II

Several conjectures spring forth
Like a many-forked brook
In which there was at least one murderer
Washing his hands and dirty linen.

III

Velocity of steel ruptured flesh and origins.
Ferocity of will punctured wind and brain.
They were but small parts of the phantom crime.

IV

Aquino and the assassin
Are one.
Aquino and the assassin and the Filipino
Are one.

V

The sense of innuendo lifts far
Above tarmac and videotape.
What bothers immensely is the thought
That the assassin could still be whistling
In the light of being alive.

VI

Yellow rain has filled our avenues.
See the yellow rain, Maria.
See it fall.
Fall fall fall.
Soon your ankles shall be covered, Maria,
By shredded walking fingers.

VII

O fat men of Ayala Avenue,
Why do you imagine black pain?
Do you not see how the assassin
Wears his robe of white lies,
And even whiter lies, and whitest lies?
White being the presence of all
Prevarications ...

VIII

I know no nobles,
We have known no nobles
Except in newsprint history.
I accept no nobles
We accept no nobles
Except the truthful assassin.

IX

When the assassin greeted the word
Of murder he greeted the world
Of recall.
Of all the songs we knew,
He sang the one
With the worst confounding lyrics.

X

He sang of departure at our sight.
He croaked, rather, of insult
To might.

XI

For nights of years we shall ride
Over the fear that pierced him,
In that he mistook
The visage of all shadow
As one with blackbirds.

XII

The islands are moving.
The blackbird must be flying.
"Ibon man may layang ..."

XIII

It was sultry summer all year long.
It was heat all over.
And it was going to rain, soon.
The assassin sat on the edge
Of twilight, without so much
As a black umbrella.

Haiku For The Times

1.
In the funhouse, lost.
Fifty million people, lost
in the translation.
2.
Tear gas and truncheons
Share the fate of games, as with
Dungeons and dragons.
3.
Voice a Molotov,
Elegies for Mendiola,
For the dead thereof.
4.
By the corner of
Paseo and Ayala
Falls a waterbag.
5.
Just as in Christmas,
One gift and one gift only —
Radio Veritas.
6.
Is Galman the one?
Or are there two, maybe three?
Each day, brief to grief.
7.
While the Phillies lost
To the Orioles, 4 to 1,
We lost a good man.

8.
Au-Au Pijuan.
Confetti revolution.
Ting-Ting Cojuangco.

9.
Plaza Miranda.
Liwasang Bonifacio.
Tondo. Binondo.

10.
Ermita. Greenhills.
When do you reach Aviles?
O yellow peril?

11.
Habeas corpus
Delicti, doloroso.
In the van, a ghost.

12.
Above us, a hole.
Would that the lying media,
Foreign, be sucked up!

13.
One suckling pig each...
Movie stars have big backyards.
"Lechon de leche!"

14.
What the heck! Don't use
"Covenant with the people..."
That's ridiculous!

15.
Lost and found, the art
Of weeping over humor,
Over death's gay heart.

In the Sixties our dialects flowered
and we were young men
who tore through underbrush,
finding hidden streams, live fish,
flying wonders, the Beatles, granola.
It was a fun time, winging from bud.

In the Seventies we spoke of terrain
turned hairy, where faces changed
sex in the quick smoke of battle.
Denials were in order, haloes
sifted through light. The closest
it was the closest it was the closest
it was the closest we got to beauty.

In the Eighties the hours rang through
politics and the weather. We sipped tea
and gazed at barometers. Shelter
became a concern. The flutes
of our lives turned time into tinny
courses, wafting through thinly.
Threads were eventually laid bare, like
the gauze of orbs dreamt by arachnids.

In the Thirties the cells of uncertainty
assembled to become walls of being, of
beginning, an idea whose crime had come.

In the Forties we danced among the victims,
tribes and breeds shorn even
of silence. Peace whispered progress
so we stumbled merrily among the ruins.

In the Fifties paradoxes came into the picture.
According to poets, the prodigal son
always stayed home. The mythic tortoise
met existentialism on a streetcorner
and together they singled out one another.

In the Nineties we escaped this earth
in numbers. Disguised as digitals
we filled the dots across brilliant
screens of circuitry. We played,
while wars faded into the background,
obscured by fresher wars. Buttons
were pushed, sticks shifted. Stones
sank and rose. Words and bones
jangled in a sort of heyday.

At the turn of the century the sage
of coinage inspired us no end,
as out of town we laughed
the doomsayers. Spark and mist
and torch and beacon turned us
round in spirals. Everywhere was dew
kissed by spires of promise. Cities
feted one another as we tuned in
to other rooms in other voices. Green
men came to dinner, praised our salads.

From 2010 on we corrected our vision
to include the false and airy.
Gay decorations were strewn along
the astral pathways, all the while
our tears fell solemnly as before.
Laughter was among us in the darkest
of cages, and stars winced as always
with the fall of directions. The scent
of defeat preceded the bath of victory.
Moon trailed sun along scopes we had charted
ever so long ago, for the dim remembering.

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